



48 Help needed on small spills says mayor

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There is a growing need for a response team in Libby to deal with small vermiculite spills caused by homeowners and contractors remodeling buildings in the area, Mayor Tony Berget told the Libby Area Technical Assistance Group during a meeting Feb. 8.

"The way we have building and remodeling going on today, I think we need something," Berget said.

He explained that he was replacing a wall fan in a residential building he owns when vermiculite came out of the wall and spilled on the floor.

"I was working on this little house and didn't know it was in there," he said.

Berget said it wasn't a lot but it was vermiculite.

The EPA's homeowner pamphlet recommends that the federal agency be notified immediately. But the local cleanup crews might not be able to

respond as quickly as a homeowner or landlord needs.

"The best thing is to give us a call so we can send someone to evaluate it and determine the best course of action," said Courtney Zamora, on-site manager for VOLPE.

However, Zamora said the quick response team concept is for bigger scale problems such as a tree falling through a building.

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"If we spend all of our time responding to these calls, it takes manpower away from the cleanup," she said.

Berget's concern is that the existing system isn't quick enough and results in remodeling delays.

LATAG chair Gayla Benefield said it is a serious

dilemma.

"I'm sorry to say we don't have this but we have thought of it," Benefield said. "We put in a request to the EPA that have a need for a person and we hope we can have someone in place to do these things."

Sean Olivera, of EPA contractor CDM, said to get a program "like this" to work the city and

the county need to put something — an ordinance — on the books.

Benefield said it's both a risk and economical problem for homeowners and landlords.

"The EPA needs to have a team set up to address these things," she said. "The biggest thing is getting the authority to have someone out there."

Part of on-going discussion

with the EPA and community members is long-term issues of vermiculite being left in walls of buildings and being discovered in the ground after the federal agency and state completes the Superfund cleanup of the Libby-Troy areas.

Berget and Benefield both said there is a need for such a program now.